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2019

Haaparanta , L 2019 , ' Brandom, Wittgenstein, and Human Encounters ' , Disputatio.
Philosophical Research Bulletin , vol. 8 , no. 9 , pp. 131 - 146 . <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3509835>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/309559>
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3509835>

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LEILA HAAPARANTA

ABSTRACT

There are several similarities between Robert B. Brandom's and the later Wittgenstein's views on linguistic meaning. Like Wittgenstein, Brandom rejects representationalism and takes linguistic practices to be the basis where all meaning rests. His inferentialism is a holistic view, already envisaged by Frege. The idea of a language game connects Brandom to Wittgenstein, although Wittgenstein's idea has also been developed in various other directions. However, unlike Wittgenstein, Brandom pays special attention to the game of giving and asking for reasons. This difference already suggests that Brandom has a strong ethical overtone in his philosophy of language. For Wittgenstein, normativity seems to be normativity of language, while for Brandom it is basically normativity of actions for which persons are responsible. Brandom's philosophy, which is loaded with deontic vocabulary, is a philosophy of human encounters. The present paper studies this very aspect of Brandom's thought. It focuses on his theory of assertions in his *Making It Explicit* (1994) and elaborates a view of assertions that is possible on Wittgenstein's terms. The paper then reappraises Wittgenstein's views on philosophy and philosophical, particularly ethical, propositions. It seeks to show that Wittgenstein comes closest to the Brandomian ethical model of discursive practice in his comments on the limits of language. These comparisons also reveal that Brandom and Wittgenstein agree on the nature of ethical vocabulary; neither of them goes in for ethical theorizing. Brandom's later works, such as his *Reason in Philosophy* (2009b), open up new perspectives on his ethical thought. This paper is primarily a study of the role that ethics plays in his philosophy of language in 1994.

WORK TYPE

Article

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:

15-June-2019

Accepted:

30-June-2019

ARTICLE LANGUAGE

English

KEYWORDS

Assertion

Ethics

Language Game

Meaning

Normativity

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Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin
Vol. 8, No. 9, Jun. 2019, pp. 0-00
ISSN: 2254-0601 | www.disputatio.eu

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Introduction

T THE VERY BEGINNING of his *Making It Explicit* Brandom tells us that his book is a book on the philosophy of language. Later on, he points out that the philosophy of language and mind, as well as epistemology are all rooted in the notion of discursive commitment (Brandom 1994, p. 203). Clearly, his work is also related to action theory, because for him sayings are doings. What he does not tell us is that his book could be a book on ethics. Therefore, it may sound all too brave to argue that it is such a book. Even if that were too strong a thesis, it is easy to argue that Brandom's work has a strong ethical overtone, because the vocabulary Brandom uses in his model of discursive practice is ethical and juridical. However, this paper seeks to open up a perspective on his philosophy from which his book can be seen as a book on ethics, not because it puts forward an ethical theory, but because it suggests or gives hints at a way of seeing our use of language from an ethical point of view. That thesis receives more content if we compare Brandom and Wittgenstein. Ethical vocabulary is not utilized in the descriptions of linguistic acts that we find in Wittgenstein's major texts. However, if we compare Brandom's philosophy of language and normativity with what Wittgenstein *does not say*, and then return to Brandom's writings, we may see Brandom's work in a new light and notice some features of his thought that may otherwise remain in the shadow. This is precisely the perspective that I will propose in this paper. I focus on Brandom's work *Making It Explicit*, particularly on his views on assertion. I then take notice of Wittgenstein's thoughts about philosophical propositions as they appear in the *Tractatus* and in *On Certainty* in order to show some less discussed aspects of Brandom's philosophy in 1994.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of the normativity of language seems to lack the ethical dimension that Brandom's terminology evokes. In his later philosophy where he introduces his idea of language-games, Wittgenstein discusses the I–

thou relation just like Brandom does. It is no news that Brandom is inspired by Wittgenstein's idea of language-games, but his philosophy seems to take a totally different direction in its choice of such terms as "commitment", "entitlement", "responsibility", and "authority". Still, there are a number of scholars who have paid attention to the ethical aspect even in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, surprisingly not as present but as absent, and ethical precisely because of being absent. This paper pays attention to those features in Wittgenstein's thought. It argues that Wittgenstein's views on the philosophical enterprise itself and of the possibility, or rather the impossibility, of theories in philosophy, including ethics, is what makes his philosophy ethical.

I will proceed as follows. In the second chapter, I will outline Brandom's model, where normative pragmatics and inferential semantics meet. I will pay attention to the features in which it is a further development of Wittgenstein's pragmatic approach and where it deviates from what Wittgenstein is doing in his so-called later philosophy. I argue that, unlike it may seem, Brandom's model is based on a balanced interplay between I and thou. I then focus on Brandom's view on assertions and the conditions that, on his view, make sayings into assertions. I compare his view with Wittgenstein's requirements for knowledge claims in his *On Certainty*. In the fourth chapter, I introduce interpretations of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which have taken a stand on the possibility of ethics in his philosophy. All of them argue that for Wittgenstein ethics is nonsense, but they disagree on what kind of nonsense is in question. The interpretation proposed by Søren Overgaard reconsiders Wittgenstein's book via Emmanuel Levinas's thought and argues that like Levinas, Wittgenstein comes to reject the idea that ethics can be captured by propositions; in fact, propositions prevent us from being ethical and seeing the other as the other. This paper concludes that even if Brandom makes explicit several features of discursive practice that Wittgenstein keeps implicit, his ethics does not turn into propositions or theories.

§ 1. Brandom's model

Brandom introduces his major project by stating that his idea is to "show what kind of understanding and explanatory power one gets from talking this way, rather than to argue that one is somehow rationally *obliged* to talk this way" (Brandom 1994, p. xii). This formulation captures the idea that Brandom's own project is not normative; instead, its aim is to propose a model that uses a specific vocabulary and makes us understand discursive practice with the help of its terms. This model can also be called a theory, which takes linguistic practice

as its object as it were outside that practice. In his model Brandom combines normative pragmatics with inferential semantics.¹ His project follows the pragmatist principle that concepts and theories should be evaluated in terms of what difference they make to practice. His maxim for semantic theories is as follows:

What gives semantic theory its philosophical point is the contribution that its investigation of the nature of contentfulness can make to the understanding of proprieties of practice, paradigmatically of judging and inferring. That semantic theory is embedded in this way in a larger explanatory matrix is accordingly important for how it is appropriate to conceive the semantic interpretants associated with what is interpreted. It means that it is pointless to attribute semantic structure or content that does no pragmatic explanatory work. (Brandom, 1994, p. 144)

As is well known, an important source for Brandom and others who support inferential semantics is Gottlob Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (1879). There Frege argues that two judgments have the same conceptual content if one can derive from them the same consequences when they are combined with a set of common premises (*BS*, § 3). In contemporary terms, that view is a form of inferentialism. Frege writes as follows:

The contents of two judgments can differ in two ways: it may be the way that the consequences which can be derived from the first judgment combined with certain others can always be derived also from the second judgment combined with the same others; secondly, this may not be the case. The two propositions "At Plataea, the Greeks defeated the Persians" and "At Plataea, the Persians were defeated by the Greeks" differ in the first way. Even if one can perceive the slight difference in sense, the agreement still predominates. Now I call the part of the contents which is the same in both, the conceptual content. (*BS*, § 3).

One may be an inferentialist in the less demanding sense and subscribe to the view that the meanings of the logical vocabulary of a formula language like that of Frege's are written down as the inferential rules of that language. The stronger claim is that the vocabulary of natural languages that is used when logical vocabulary is translated into natural language and back, receives its content by means of inferential rules, such as rules of introduction and elimination. As a general semantic theory, inferentialism is the view that even the meanings of non-logical vocabulary are captured by rules, even if not by any

¹ For Brandomian inferentialism, also see Peregrin (2014).

explicit rules that are written down in logic books.

Brandom extends the idea of a conceptual role from logical constants to the non-logical vocabulary of language and to the material inferences between concepts. Frege's distinction between judgeable contents and judgments is also used by Brandom, for example, in his idea that assertions and beliefs are commitments *to* something, namely to propositional contents; those contents correspond to Frege's judgeable or conceptual contents (Frege, BS, § 2; Brandom 1994, pp. 94–95).² Like Frege, Brandom moves from judging, asserting, and inferring, to judgments, assertions, and inferences; hence, from doing or action to the outcome of doing or to that which is produced. Besides Frege, another philosophical source that encourages inferentialist thought is Wilfrid Sellars, who takes the meaning of a linguistic expression to be determined by the role it has in relation to perception, other linguistic expressions, and overt behaviour, and to whom the connections between perception, language, and action are not regularities understandable in behaviouristic terms, but who considers them rule-governed and social (Sellars 1974, pp. 423–424). Also for Brandom, it is the rules that govern practice, not the regularities that we may find in practice, that are taken into account in building a semantic theory. Brandom extends the idea of normativity from what is regarded as formal to what is regarded as material in language up to the point where a difference can be seen in practice. Brandom's project is to make norms explicit; still, he rejects any Platonism about rules; we do not act on our conceptions of rules, or on explicitly formulated rules. Instead, it is the practice of the persons or the users of language that is the final court. The normative attitude that Brandom emphasizes includes the human activity of evaluating, hence, treating our own and others' utterances as correct or incorrect (Brandom 1994, p. 37). One might suggest that Brandom rejects regulism, because it would not bring about ethical actions but only mechanical rule-following.

Brandom is thus against regulism, which is taking norms as explicit rules or principles (Brandom 1994, p. 18). He relies on Wittgenstein's regress argument and concludes that "there is a need for a *pragmatist* conception of norms —a notion of primitive correctnesses of performance *implicit* in *practice* that precede and are presupposed by their *explicit* formulation in *rules* and *principles*" (*ibid.*, p. 21). He emphasizes that Wittgenstein set up a problem of how to make sense of a notion of implicit norm, which deviates both from regulism, which takes norms to be explicit, and from regularism, which rejects the notion of norm

² Also see Brandom (2000), pp. 49–61.

(*ibid.*, p. 29).

The vocabulary of Brandom's model for discursive practice is close to that favoured by deontological ethics. It includes such words as "commitment", "entitlement", "responsibility", "authority", "deontic status", and "deontic attitude". On that model, commitment and entitlement are two kinds of deontic statuses. One who is entitled to assert has authority; one who is committed to what has been said has responsibility. One who asserts is entitled to make inferences from what is asserted and to use the assertion as a reason. Being committed to a belief and expressing the acknowledgment of that commitment has a consequence for further actions of the asserter; the acknowledgment means that she is also committed to give reasons for her assertion if her addressee asks for them. The term "deontic attitude" that Brandom uses means a person's attitude of taking an asserter to be committed or entitled. (Brandom 1994, pp. 157–168). The parties of discursive practice have both deontic statuses and deontic attitudes. The addressee takes assertions to be commitments whose reasons she is allowed to ask the asserter; the asserter, for her part, is responsible for giving those reasons.

On Brandom's account, a belief is modelled on a commitment that is acknowledged by making an assertion, and commitment and entitlement correspond to obligation and permission. On his model, a deontic attitude is a person's attitude of taking or treating an asserter, whether that asserter is the person herself or another person, as committed or entitled. The addressee is the one who decides what the status is; therefore, it seems as if the addressee were the "I" who has power over the asserter, the "thou". However, the assessor may also be the person who asserts, or the asserter may construe her own status in the eyes of the potential addressee, hence, as the status of one who is responsible for her claims. Therefore, even if the deontic attitude is decisive in view of the asserter's deontic status, it is the interplay of the two parties that the model describes. In discursive practice the asserter's deontic status may also change as a consequence of her and the addressee's actions.

For Brandom it is I–thou relations that form the fundamental social structure (Brandom 1994, p. 39). Brandom argues that we must construe the normative attitude as somehow implicit in the practice of the assessor, rather than explicit as the endorsement of a proposition (*ibid.*, p. 33). Hence, even if his project is to make implicit structures explicit, he does not bring the project so far that he would write down the normative attitudes as endorsements of propositions. Even if his vocabulary thus serves to make some of the implicit norms explicit, it is only the general patterns that it reveals. He introduces and

utilizes ethical vocabulary in order to describe linguistic practice, but he does not propose any metavocabulary for that vocabulary, or a philosophical point of view, from which such concepts as responsibility would be taken as objects of an ethical theory.

What then *is* made explicit in Brandom's project in 1994? One who infers according to the rules of logic, one who reasons according to those rules, *uses* the rules to open up the content of her assertions. In that sense logical rationality is expressive, to adopt the term that Brandom himself uses. Reasoning is making implicit explicit, it is "making implicit, content-conferring inferential commitments explicit as the contents of assertional commitments" (*ibid.*, p. 116). On the other hand, Brandom himself makes explicit what is implicit precisely by means of his model of discursive practice. He argues that he introduces a model of language use, which he calls the deontic scorekeeping model of discursive practice. In that model an assertion is treated as the undertaking or acknowledging of a certain kind of commitment. Language use itself is seen as making something explicit, and its general pattern is given in ethical terms, but the rules of that process are made explicit only so far as the proposed model makes them explicit. On the scorekeeping model, competent linguistic practitioners keep track of their own and each other's commitments and entitlements (*ibid.*, pp. 141–142).

Brandom argues: "The strategy is to describe a simplified system of social practices in which something can be taken or treated *as* (having the significance of) an assertion —the acknowledging of commitment to an assertible content" (*ibid.*, p. 157). Here Brandom refers to Frege, who uses the term "judgeable content". Frege made the distinction between the thought (*der Gedanke*), the judgment (*das Urteil*), which is an acknowledgment of the truth of the thought, and the assertion (*die Behauptung*), which is the linguistic expression of the judgment.³ Brandom deviates from Frege in that he understands judgments primarily as what is expressed by assertions. He notes that in his model "*propositional* contents (believables) are accordingly to be picked out by the pragmatic property of being assertible" (*ibid.*, p. 157). He further argues that asserting cannot be understood apart from inferring, and inferring is understood as a certain kind of move in the game of giving and asking for reasons. For him, inferring must be understood "in an interpersonal context, as an aspect of an essentially *social* practice of communication" (*ibid.*, p. 158).

On the other hand, Brandom argues that inferring cannot be understood apart from asserting (*ibid.*, p. 158). He emphasizes that both the first-person

³ See, e.g., BS, § 2, and "Der Gedanke", KS, 346.

point of view and the third-person assessments are essential aspects of inferential practice. He states that deliberation is the internalization of the interpersonal, communicative practice of giving and asking for reasons, “just as judgment is the internalization of a public process of assertion” (*ibid.*). In his model the assessments seem to be central; however, it is we as asserters who assess as well as the other who keeps the deontic score. In the I–thou relation I and thou have equal roles, and the roles may change. I am assessed by the other, I am assessed by myself, and the other is assessed by me. Brandom describes his model of assertional and inferential practice, which is not a description of our actual practice but an artificial idealization of it (*ibid.*). He further notes that commitment and entitlement correspond to the traditional deontic primitives of obligation and permission, but he avoids those terms, because they refer to authorities, and by using them he might raise the question who has a right to impose those statuses (*ibid.*, p. 160).

There are thus two kinds of practical deontic attitudes that can be adopted toward commitments: one can attribute them to others and acknowledge or undertake them oneself. Brandom translates the talk of statuses into talk of attitudes: language users keep score on deontic statuses by undertaking those statuses to others and undertaking them themselves (*ibid.*, pp. 165–166). He states:

This constellation —of commitment and entitlement, of authority and responsibility, and of an inheritance of entitlement to assertional commitments that is *interpersonal* and *intracontent* as well as *intrapersonal* and *intercontent*— constitutes a fundamental substructure of the model of assertional practices presented here. (*Ibid.*, p. 175)

Brandom remarks that Wittgenstein suggests this sort of picture of the practices of giving and asking for reasons, but that it can also be found in the Socratic method (*ibid.*, p. 178). In Wittgenstein’s language–games, there is the “I” and the “thou”, but no such ethical model as that elaborated by Brandom can be found in his texts. As noted above, it may seem as if the one who has the deontic attitude towards the other, hence, one who is the assessor, is the “critical voice”, who decides on the status of the asserter. It seems as if she were the one who dominates. However, that is not the picture that Brandom’s model brings about, because I can also be thou, hence, the roles may be changed, and I can also be the assessor of myself in my inner dialogue.

§ 2. Brandom and Wittgenstein on assertions

Following Frege and most of the analytic tradition, Brandom distinguishes between propositional content and assertive force. His theory of assertion has been called the commitment account. Like other theories of assertion, it gives explanations to linguistic phenomena, such as the phenomenon that we regard it as incorrect to say: “p but I do not know that p.” For Brandom, knowledge is a hybrid deontic status, which involves commitment and entitlement, and asserting is making a knowledge claim (Brandom 1994, pp. 202–203). Brandom also mentions what he calls bare assertions; they correspond to mere beliefs. In those assertions, the deontic status of the asserter is peculiar in that it brings in something of the authority, but disavows the responsibility that is normally undertaken by the asserter (*ibid.*, p. 229).

Wittgenstein does not put forward any theory of assertion. On the contrary, his view might be close to what Herman Cappelen calls the No-Assertion view and what Cappelen himself supports. Cappelen argues that it is not theoretically useful to single out a subset of sayings as assertions. He wants to reject the whole Fregean distinction and the term “assertion”, which he regards as “largely a philosophers’ invention” (Cappelen 2011, p. 21). Unlike those who have proposed theories of assertion, he argues that the term “assertion” is not useful if we wish to explain linguistic phenomena. He takes it to be sufficient to talk about sayings, which are governed by variable, non-constitutive norms. Cappelen argues that sayings are evaluated by norms that vary over time and across contexts, cultures, and possible worlds (*ibid.*, p. 22). Wittgenstein would probably follow this line of thought in his critical attitude towards essences and semantic theories. Unlike Wittgenstein, Brandom is not against such theorizing.

In addition to Brandom’s theory, there are other types of accounts of assertion. John MacFarlane distinguishes between four main types, which Sanford Goldberg calls the attitudinal account, the common ground account, the commitment account, and the constitutive rule account (MacFarlane 2011, p. 80; Goldberg 2015, pp. 9–10). The commitment account, which is represented by Brandom and MacFarlane, and the constitutive rule account, are normative theories, but normative in different ways; as MacFarlane notes, the constitutive rule account looks at norms for making assertions, whereas the commitment account seeks for normative effects of making assertions (MacFarlane 2011, p. 91). On the commitment account, assertions are sayings that are accompanied by certain commitments, such as the commitment to give reasons when challenged. On Brandom’s theory, all assertions are testimonies, even if the authority and the burden of responsibility that they carry may vary

depending on the context. Brandom distinguishes between different ways of exhibiting entitlement: one may give an inferential justification, or refer to her non-inferential reliable perception, or to a testifier's assertion. He also states that we inherit authority from the asserter (Brandom 1994, p. 532).⁴

As stated above, for Brandom, assertions are knowledge claims. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein comments on the ways in which the expression "I know" is used in language (*OC* §90). In his remarks he is concerned about the epistemic grounds for assertings, particularly for philosophical assertings. He discusses the so-called Moore sentences like "I know that this is my hand" or "I know that the world has existed before my birth". On Wittgenstein's view, the expression "I know" is used correctly only if it is possible to justify the knowledge claim. Moreover, he requires that it should be possible to doubt whether the claim is true, and to be mistaken when making the claim. On his view, we can use the word "to know" correctly only if doubt and error are not excluded. Moreover, in order to doubt something, one has to be certain about something, such as what is expressed by the Moore sentences (*OC* §§115–116, 360, 446). Wittgenstein suggests that asserting that p presupposes that one can also meaningfully assert that one knows that p . He thinks that philosophers' discourse does not fulfil that requirement (*OC* § 467). Hence, on his view, philosophers do not succeed in making assertions.⁵

§ 3. Wittgenstein's view on ethics and Brandom's ethical vocabulary

What was noticed above, already points towards the idea that philosophy, including ethics, and philosophical propositions have a special role in Wittgenstein's philosophy. One might say they form the frame where I and thou meet, the frame for discursive practice, but they are not on the same level with that practice. As was shown in the previous chapter, Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* suggests that philosophical discourse does not comply with the norms of linguistic practice, on Wittgenstein's view.

That philosophical assertions, including ethical assertions, are problematic for Wittgenstein, is clearly visible already in his *Tractatus*. Søren Overgaard (2009) distinguishes between three interpretations of Wittgenstein's view on ethics. According to what can be called the standard or the received view, ethics is nonsense, but important nonsense, because ethical propositions *show*

⁴ Also see Haaparanta (2018).

⁵ See Haaparanta (2019).

something important even if they *do not say* anything. Hence, on this view, ethical truths are something that can be shown, but not said. There is another interpretation, proposed by Cora Diamond, among others, according to which ethical propositions are simply nonsense, that there is nothing whatsoever that they could even show, that the whole idea of showing must be rejected. Overgaard himself suggests that like Emmanuel Levinas, Wittgenstein asks us to give up the propositions of the *Tractatus*, because propositions are a hindrance if we wish to have an ethical relation to the other. They, as it were, form a veil between I and the other. On this interpretation, it is theories, in this case particularly ethical theories, consisting of propositions that prevent the direct contact between I and thou, to use Brandom's pair of words. Hence, on this reading of Wittgenstein, there cannot be ethical theories and ethical propositions for a philosopher who seeks for an ethical attitude towards the other; for such a philosopher, there are no propositions at all that would even show ethical truths, let alone assert them.

In his *Tractatus* Wittgenstein describes ethics as "transcendental", as something that cannot be expressed in sentences (*TLP* § 6.421). In his "Lecture on Ethics" the same idea is clearly presented. Wittgenstein states in his lecture that ethics "if it is anything, it is supernatural and our words will only express facts" (*E*, p. 7). He then continues:

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just *go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language. (*E*, p. 11)

On his view, when we use ethical propositions, we "run against the boundaries of language" (*E*, p. 12).

I do not choose a side in the debates concerning the various interpretations of Wittgenstein and ethics. However, there is one important feature in Wittgenstein's view on ethics and philosophy more generally for one who wishes to compare Brandom's project with that of Wittgenstein. That feature is easily seen in Wittgenstein's thought, quite independently of which period one considers and on which of the mentioned interpretations one is inclined to rely. That feature, which I already suggested, is the idea that ethical theory is not possible. In his interpretation Overgaard draws interesting conclusions from this fact concerning Wittgenstein's thought. He argues that according to Levinas, even by writing books about the Other and about the ethical relation,

he makes this relation and the related beings into philosophical themes, hence, something that is said in propositions (Overgaard 2009, p. 228). Ethics disappears, when it is put into words. Instead, on the standard interpretation, by the nonsense of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein succeeds at hinting at ethical truths, even if he does not make direct ethical claims (*ibid.*, p. 223). Friedrich Waismann reports Wittgenstein's saying as follows:

If I were told anything that was a *theory*, I would say, No, No! That does not interest me. Even if this theory were true, it would not interest me—it would not be the exact thing I was looking for. What is ethical cannot be taught. If I could explain the essence of the ethical only by means of a theory, then what is ethical would be of no value whatsoever. At the end of my lecture on ethics I spoke in the first person: I think that this is something very essential. (Waismann 1979, pp. 116–117)

Cora Diamond suggests that if we wish to understand moral thinking, we should follow in Wittgenstein's footsteps. She argues that the approach towards ethics that can be found in the *Tractatus* differs radically from that of philosophical ethics. On Diamond's view, its starting-point is the idea that "ethics" is not a term for a subject matter alongside other subjects, any more than "logic" is. What Diamond claims is that on Wittgenstein's view, there is no moral vocabulary through which we mean moral things. She concludes that if one wanted to give sense to the term "moral vocabulary", one might mean the vocabulary we use in saying things that might have application in moral life. She thinks, however, that that does not exclude any words (Diamond 1996, pp. 251–253).

Wittgenstein's texts as well as the interpretations described above all point to the obvious conclusion that, to adopt Brandom's terms, Wittgenstein does not regard it as possible to make ethics explicit. Brandom uses ethical vocabulary in (1994), but he does not propose any ethical theory, either. His view may be in accordance with the idea that philosophers suggest or hint at ethics, but at least it is compatible with all those interpretations of Wittgenstein in which ethics is seen to remain unsaid. For Brandom, ethics is not explicit; instead, it is used in his model. Models in science and in Brandom's philosophy alike are something that is more familiar to us than what they are models of. His view on models and theorizing is also expressed in his "Metaphilosophical Reflections on the Idea of Metaphysics" (2009a). There he states that scientism of the methodological monist and the impossibility of systematic philosophical theorizing about discursive practice are not the only alternatives for a philosopher of language (Brandom 2009a, p. 44). One might postulate

meanings, he says, to explain proprieties of use, where the latter are expressed in non-semantic vocabulary. He states that “*description* is also a central and essential element of scientific methodology, and even the most rigorous versions of Wittgensteinian quietism allow philosophers to describe features of our linguistic practice” (*ibid.*, p. 45). In *Making It Explicit* ethical vocabulary is precisely the vocabulary that is used to describe its features.

§ 4. Conclusion

This paper focused on Brandom’s model of deontic scorekeeping in (1994), which is a model of discursive practice, particularly of assertive speech acts. It paid special attention to the fact that the vocabulary of the model is ethical. It is important to note—and this could be seen more clearly after an excursion into Wittgenstein’s thought—that Brandom *uses* ethical vocabulary in his philosophy of language, but he does not present an ethical theory. Even if he does not present such a theory, the very vocabulary directs our attention to ethics. For Wittgenstein, philosophical propositions must be thrown away, and their radical difference from normal moves in language-games must be realized. On his view, semantics cannot be made explicit as a theory; this is precisely something that Brandom does. As for ethics, Wittgenstein denies the possibility of ethical propositions, hence also ethical theories, without, however, depriving ethics of its value. For him, ethics is unsayable. In his philosophy of language, Brandom makes explicit more than Wittgenstein is ready to make in his descriptions of various language-games. However, both Brandom and Wittgenstein have the I-thou relation in focus. Ethics is the point of view from which Brandom considers discursive practice in (1994). Like Wittgenstein, he does not construct a theory between the “I” and the “thou”.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Haaparanta, Leila (2019). «Brandom, Wittgenstein, and Human Encounters». *Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin* 8, no. 9: pp. 00–00.